

## Illuminating Phantasmatic Doubles: Hector Durville's and Albert de Rochas' Occultist Magnetism Photography

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•From 1887 Hector Durville was often photographed passing his right hand laterally above his magnetized subject's forehead while making longitudinal passes down their body with his left hand to induct them through eight levels of magnetic trance and unleash their magnetic energies. Once denounced as "charlatanry", the practice of mesmerism in fin-de-siècle France burgeoned to such an extent that this period has aptly been called one of neo-magnetism. •Promoted as a purgative for conditions ranging from impotence to indigestion, as well as a conduit to the vital force, crowds flocked to consult Durville and buy •his busts and posters of his head charting hypnogenic points and magnetic triggers.<sup>1</sup> As it thrived, neo-magnetism intersected with the new sciences of electromagnetism, •radioactivity and X-rays, alongside Spiritism, Parapsychology and •Theosophy in its aspiration of visibilizing invisible energies and illuminating phantasmatic bodies, •particularly through photography. Conceiving of the photographic plate as uniquely sensitive to ephemeral energy, with a facility to capture fleeting phantasmatic bodies at less than two-thousandth part of a second, Durville and •his collaborator, parapsychologist, Albert de Rochas, insisted that only "through this photography can we see how our instincts, senses, faculties, tastes and qualities ... regarded as attributes of the soul, leave the physical body to travel with the astral body." Only through this photography did they consider that they could prove scientifically the existence of the etheric and astral body. As Durville vigorously proclaimed: •"The dedoubling of the human body is a rigorously scientific fact especially since publication of ... my *Living Phantoms* with its photographs showing the universality of this phenomenon and its realization through magnetism."

•Two years after founding the French Magnetic Society in Paris in 1887, Durville and his son, •Henri, convened the International Congress on Magnetism.<sup>2</sup> With the support of Rochas, they launched the École de Magnétisme. With its own •publishing house and •journal on magnetism and experimental psychism,<sup>3</sup> their Ecole attracted such foundational members as Madame Blavatsky, Hippolyte Baraduc, Stanislas de Guaita and Sar Péladan.<sup>4</sup> In his •*History of Magnetism and Practical Psychism*, Durville demonstrated how the magnetic poles •punctuated every part of the human body as signified by the positive and negative signs. Through magnetism, •Durville signified how magnetic energy was able to flow, like an electric current down and up through the body, as well as from the body. Likened to a flickering flame that could project as far as four to five metres either horizontally or vertically, Durville considered magnetic energy constituted the vital force. So powerful was this vital magnetic force that Durville and Rochas compared it to •rays and electrical sparks able to energize the body physically and psychically, as demonstrated by radiation to and from 'radiant man'.

•Seeming to move like the lines of a magnetic force field, Durville and Rochas correlated this radiating aura to •the etheric and •astral body double as •theosophized by Annie Besant, cited by Durville throughout *Phantom of the Living*. Conceiving of photography as having a unique receptivity to their energies, Durville and Rochas commissioned photographs onto magnesium plates to reveal how magnetism mediated this doubling. Composed of four ethers interpenetrating the solid, liquid and gaseous constituents of the physical body like an etheric envelope, Besant described the colour of this etheric double as luminous white or clear grey.<sup>5</sup> •That this white or gray etheric double could form alongside the physical body, once magnetized, was initially captured by Paul Nadar's photographs of Rochas in his study with his phantom who appears both taller and wider than him and able to echo his stance. Aware of the •phantasmatic ramifications of this phenomenon, Durville and Rochas explored, with the aid of Nadar, how these luminous emanations could take the form of phantoms during magnetism of other subjects.

Following the phantom's powerful vibratory energy and imbrication within the vital force, Durville stipulated that their appearance followed a choreography of distinct stages invariably reflecting the state and gender of the physical body. From Durville's magnetism of three women, Nénette, Edmée and Jane, he found that phantoms invariably appeared as a double of the female body, as illustrated by •these photos taken in 1905 of a young girl with her etheric or astral double. This was confirmed by Durville's photographs of •Mme Lambert's double in 1908. A medium who Durville and Rochas frequently magnetised, Lambert found that throughout the day and night during and after these sessions, a phantom visited her. •Initially the phantom appeared as a fluid vapourous mass of light, accompanied by spots of light floating in darkness. •Yet gradually Lambert found that it transformed into a luminous, white pillar or column, taller and larger than herself. •After further magnetism, she watched it became increasingly luminous until it condensed into a human form taking the shape of a woman, with a body and face uncannily like her own. By no means did it shy away but visited Lambert until 1913 as •subsequent photos reveal. Situating itself about 20 centimetres from Lambert's left side, •it repeated, "like a shadow, all her movements and gestures". Whenever she raised and lowered her arms, so did her phantom. So closely did it shadow Lambert that it even lay beside her in bed. •Seeming animated by intense vibratory movements, Lambert found her double knocked loudly on tables and furniture, banged doors, and created such intense energy and heat that Durville was able to measure it with a thermometer.<sup>6</sup> "This is her double, her phantom", Durville explained, "who is always on her left and sometimes just in front of her."<sup>7</sup>

•When Rochas' magnetized Laurent in 1892, he reported a blue column with a luminous glow appearing on the left of Laurent's physical body, accompanied by a red phantom on the right. "These columns became more and more luminous but without distinct form. They were as large as they were high taking the profile of his body," Rochas recalled. "When I touched the phantom with my hand, Laurent felt my contact. When I pinched my hand on the phantom, Laurent felt the pinch ...".<sup>8</sup> Even when in a separate space from

the physical body, the phantasmatic double was able to make it feel “blows, touches and pulls by invisible hands”. •To demonstrate this integration between the Physical and Astral Bodies, Rochas and Durville photographed the body of a magnetized woman before the Astral Body had been injured and after it showing the wound that she received. •The power of the phantom to glide through walls and doors in front of the physical body or vertically behind it, covering a kilometre in 15 seconds, appeared matched by its power to radiate white light in different forms.<sup>9</sup>

During all of Durville's experiments, particularly in 1908 with •the phantom of Léontine, he found the phantom able to generate, •a brilliant white light through the luminous ball floating by the head of the phantom, which •he captured in a close-up. Not only did Durville's photographs reveal •its jets of light beaming in different directions but also •its flaming luminosity – sufficiently dazzling, as Mme Lambert recalled, •to light up a dark room. Believing that the phantom emanated •N-rays, the phosphorescent radiation discovered by René Blondot, Durville endeavoured to register this light at night on screens covered with calcium sulphide, a substance believed to produce brightness in contact with N-rays and equivalent to •effluviographs.<sup>10</sup> •“I took the small screen ... and placed it on the abdomen of the magnetized subject for two or three minutes without obtaining the slightest trace of luminosity”, Durville recalled. “I then placed it by the phantom, and it became very strongly illuminated [giving] enough light to enable [us] to tell the time by a watch.”<sup>11</sup> This phantom, concluded Durville, carried the “very principle of life, as well as will, intelligence, memory, consciousness and all of the psychical senses.” These experiments with magnetic energies and the phantom then proved, according to Durville, that a living force existed independent of matter. They also proved that as humans were perpetually dedoubling with their etheric and astral bodies, their power was not limited to their physical body. Yet while the magnetized physical body was photographed as tied to but separate from its phantasmatic double, •both Durville and Rochas maintained that magnetism also had the power to transport the physical body

into the superconscious state of the astral plane, especially when fused with art.<sup>12</sup> •Rochas theorized this state as an exteriorization of sensibility.

In his experiments, Rochas explored how the magnetic force radiating in and from the physical body could charge the human nervous system and its fluid energies into unleashing a •“superior form of being” with heightened sight, taste, hearing and touch. In this superconscious state, Rochas discovered that magnetized subjects were able to feel musical vibrations and perform to them, perceive places they had never seen and respond to art that they had never known, •as realized when Rochas magnetized the artist's model, Lina (Maria Mayo) and commissioned •Nadar to photograph her.<sup>13</sup> Without any training in mime, theatre performance or dance, the mesmerized Lina was able to perform in highly innovative ways to Wagner's music, Verlaine's poetry, Ravel's waltzes and national allegories •with dramatic expressions comparable to those of experienced actors.<sup>14</sup> This was demonstrated by the photographs Rochas published in *Sentiments, Music and Gestures* of Lina's body gestures and facial expressions when responding to such •patriotic vignettes as Alsace and Lorraine being torn from France. Sinking onto her knees, with her face uplifted and eyes filled with tears, she clutched her head. •On their imagined return, she rose with her arms outstretched in a welcoming embrace. •Since music heightened the vibratory force of magnetism, a phenomenon Rochas had observed affecting animals as much as humans, he captured •Lina's performance of the *Marseillaise* in cinemaphotography. Musical vibrations seemed able to jolt Lina's nerve fibres and sensibilities, Rochas concluded, penetrating her unconscious sensibilities far more directly.

Once deeply magnetized, with the aid of music and Nadar's photography Rochas was able to reveal how Lina achieved a doubling within her physical body, as if both her etheric and astral bodies had fused with it to achieve a state of superconscious. •This appeared acutely evident to Rochas, in his last photographs taken of Lina dancing the *Habanera* from George Bizet's *Carmen*. This happened only after Rochas had given Lina prolonged passes to take her from the fifth to the eighth phase of magnetism where her

sensibilities became so exteriorized that they could form a phantom. •The more the music vibrated, according to Rochas, the more vibrantly Lina danced, as can be seen in the left photo, and exorcised her body of effluvia, as can be seen in the right photo. •The more luminous forms seemed to gather around her, according to Rochas, the more they gradually condensed and stratified into brilliant white light forms and rays a metre in front of her. These luminous rays then seemed to join her body, as signified by the white lines intersecting with her head, arms and hands in the right photo. "This column then took the form of her [gyrating] carnal body", Rochas explained, "both visible and palpable to all present and proven by these instantaneous photographs taken with a Kodak. This phantom exteriorized from the interior of her body, is known," he concluded, "by the names astral or etheric body."

•Drawing up a table of octaves and vibrations showing how 16 octaves corresponded to 38,000 vibrations per second, Rochas then deduced that the energies produced by music and dance in Lina had the power to exteriorize not just the etheric but the astral body. Exteriorised by the energies of dance and music, the astral body was then able, Rochas deduced, to have an effect upon the photographic plate which, he claimed, "has a sensibility to capture, as one knows, thousands of stars invisible to our eyes."

•Only due to the special receptivity of this Occultist Magnetist photography to ephemeral energy did Durville, like Rochas, consider that invisible magnetic forces could be visibilized, as illuminated by Nadar's photography revealing the exteriorization of Madame Lambert's etheric and astral bodies through her phantom. Conceiving of the photographic plate as

•uniquely sensitive, with a facility to capture fleeting phantasmatic bodies at less than two-thousandth part of a second, Durville insisted that only "through this photography can we see how our instincts, senses, faculties, tastes and qualities ... regarded as attributes of the soul, leave the physical body to travel with the astral body." In being able "to furnish unquestionable proof of the dedoublement of the living subject", both Durville and Rochas then claimed that Nadar's and Rochas' photography enabled them to demonstrate conclusively that the phantasmatic double was not the product of

autosuggestion", let alone the product of special effects but a "fact".<sup>15</sup>

- Dismissing the skepticism of some scientists that these photographs were the products of special affect, Durville stated: *"The dedoubling of the human body is a rigorous scientific fact especially since publication of ... my Living Phantoms with its photographs showing the universality of this phenomenon and its realization through magnetism."* Since this phantom appeared to exist and function apart from the physical body during life and after death, Durville dramatically concluded that ultimately this Occultist Magnetist photography of magnetic energies had scientifically proven not only that the vital force was independent of matter, with equivalent attributes to the theological concept of the soul, but also that "immortality is a rigorous scientific fact."<sup>16</sup>

Musical vibrations seemed able to jolt Lina's nerve fibres and sensibilities, •Rochas claimed, penetrating her unconscious sensibilities far more directly as epitomized by her dancing of *Ecstasy*. •Not only did Lina dance vibrantly to the waltzes of Louis Saraz, •Spanish and •Arabic music, but also •*Dies Irae* and •Wagner's *Siegfried*, culminating in her •joyous performance of Galathée's "wine, wine is a treasure divine". Such emotionally arousing music under magnetic hypnosis enabled Lina to achieve a fulsome state of self-liberation, Rochas observed. "The music of Wagner has vivified her", he concluded, "particularly the theme of love in *Siegfried*." Yet when asked her impressions on coming out of her magnetized states, all she could provide were such vague responses as: "This is gay or sad; that makes me want to dance or to cry." •"Lina's personality is in no way remarkable," observed Jules Bois. "Awake, she was but moderately fond of music and poetry. She could not dance. In trance ... she executed the most difficult steps of Europe and Asia. ... She gave expression to every form of beauty and of horror, to every sentiment and every passion ... Once swept by magnetic hypnosis, a second personality awoke in her subconscious, profound, very old ... very new, for she had all the charm of youth, all the surprises, all the divine inexperience of instinct. ... But her control of judgment and will had vanished. This genius did not know what she did."

With the aid of Nadar's photography, Rochas was able to reveal how Lina, once deeply magnetized, achieved a doubling within her physical body, as if her etheric and astral bodies had fused with it to achieve a state of superconscious. This appeared acutely evident, for Rochas, in the •last photographs taken of Lina dancing the *Habanera* from George Bizet's *Carmen*. This occurred only after Rochas had given Lina •prolonged passes to take her from the fifth to the eighth phase of magnetism where her sensibilities became so exteriorized that they could form a phantom. The more the music vibrated, according to Rochas, the more vibrantly Lina danced and exorcised her body of effluvia, •as can be seen in the left photo. The more luminous forms seemed to gather around her, the more they gradually condensed and stratified into brilliant white light forms and rays a metre in front of her. These luminous rays then seemed to join her body, as signified by the white lines



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Exteriorised by the energies of dance and music, the astral body was then able, Rochas deduced, to have an effect upon the photographic plate which, he claimed, "has a sensibility to capture, as one knows, thousands of stars invisible to our eyes." •Only due to this special receptivity of photography did Durville, like Rochas, consider that invisible magnetic energies could be visibilized, as illuminated by Nadar's photography revealing the integration of the etheric and astral bodies with Lina's dancing body and the exteriorization of Madame Lambert's etheric and astral bodies through her phantom. In being able "to furnish unquestionable proof of the dedoublement of the living subject", both Durville and Rochas then claimed that Nadar's photography enabled them to demonstrate conclusively that the phantasmatic double was not the product of autosuggestion", let alone of special effects but a "fact" able to exist and function apart from the physical body during life and after death. Determined to align neo-magnetism with both Occultism and the new sciences, Durville then dramatically concluded that ultimately the photography of magnetic energies had scientifically proven not only that the vital force was independent of matter, with equivalent attributes to the theological concept of the soul, but also that "immortality is a rigorous scientific fact."<sup>17</sup>

## EDITS

As Rochas surmised, two fluidic masses unify at the left of the subject: "an indecisive mass, a vaporous column, sensibly higher and larger than the subject. Following the action of magnetism directed at it and the subject, the mass diminishes in volume, condenses, becomes more luminous and little by little, takes a human form. As this form condenses further, it takes the exact form of the subject. This is their double, their phantom, which is always by their left side and sometimes in front of them. The contours are more or less clear and precise. With the continuance of the magnetism, the phantom becomes more condensed and more luminous particularly the head. Once it attains a certain point of condensation, it takes the attitude of the subject. If the subject is sitting comfortably in an armchair, so will the phantom. Like a shadow, he repeats all the movements and gestures of the subject. As it passes from one milieu to another, so clear is its image, that it can be photographed." Not only did it become clear to the magnetized subject but also to the magnetizer and others. Hence, as Durville concluded, they were able to "furnish proof of the dedoublement of the living subject through photographing le corps physique and the phantom" and, in so doing, prove that it was not the product of autosuggestion.

Taking Rochas investigations one step further, Durville conducted a series of experiments to determine the phantasm's sensory dimensions. He found the sense of vision, smell, taste and touch in these phantoms was also far more developed than in the physical body.<sup>18</sup>

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Immediately the French Magnetist Society, Hector Durville, opened an École de Magnétisme in Paris in 1893, it attracted such foundational members as Madame Blavatsky, Hippolyte Baraduc, Stanislas da Guiata, Sar Péladan and the parapsychologist, Albert de Rochas. During this flourishing of Neo-Magnetism alongside the new sciences of electromagnetism, radioactivity and X-rays, Durville and Rochas endeavoured to capture how the etheric and astral body doubles were unleashed by their mesmerized subjects in the form of phantoms through their development of occultist magnetism photography. Conceiving of their photographic plates as uniquely sensitive to ephemeral energy, with a facility to capture fleeting phantasmatic bodies at less than two-thousandth part of a second, “only through this photography”, Durville explained, “can we see how our instincts, senses, faculties, tastes and qualities ... regarded as attributes of the soul, leave the physical body to travel with the astral body.” Their occultist magnetism photography had the power to illuminate, Durville and Rochas both claimed, how phantasmatic bodies were able to perform not only like shadows of the physical body, reiterating its movements and gestures, but also how they were able to pierce material objects and radiate light “sufficiently dazzling to light up a dark room.”

Conterminously, Rochas endeavoured to demonstrate how the magnetic fluid inducted by mesmerism was so powerful that it was like an electric current or electromagnet able to charge the nervous system into unleashing a “superior form of being” with heightened sight, taste, hearing and touch. With the aid of occultist magnetism photography, Rochas then revealed how his patient, Lina, once deeply magnetized, was able to perform art of which she had no knowledge and achieve a doubling within her physical body. While dancing in mesmeric trances, her phantasmatic double became exteriorized from the interior of her body, which Rochas photographed and identified as her astral or etheric body. By focusing upon the occultist magnetism photography of Durville and Rochas, this paper will endeavor to reveal the instrumental role these images were meant to play in illuminating the power of phantasmatic doubles.

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<sup>1</sup> For 'neo-mesmerism', refer Anne Harrington, "Metals and magnets in medicine: hysteria, hypnosis and medical culture in fin-de-siècle Paris", *Psychological Medicine*, 18, February 1988, No. 1, 21–38.

<sup>2</sup> The French Magnetic Society attracted such foundational members as Madame Blavatsky, Hippolyte Baraduc, Sar Péladan and Gerard Encausse 'Papus'.

<sup>3</sup> Congrès international sur le magnétisme, 21-26 October 1889; Rapport Général, Paris, Carré, 1890; Congrès Spirite, Paris, 1889; Congrès Spirit et Spiritualiste international, Paris, 9-16 September 1889; another in 1902; Congrès international de psychologie physiologique: Première session. Paris, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Hector Durville, *L'Enseignement du magnétisme*, École pratique de magnétisme et de massage, Paris: Librairie du Magnétisme, Septembre 1895).

<sup>5</sup> Besant considered the etheric double was visible to the telepathic body and the eye trained by Spiritism, Theosophy and Magnetism. She also considered its height that of a twelve-year old physical body. She considered the Astral Body often appeared with a cord extending from its head or navel to the physical body.

<sup>6</sup> Durville, *Le Fantome des vivants*, 1909, p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Durville, *Le Fantome des vivants*, 1909, p. 180: *Bientot, cette forme qui se condense encore, prend exactement celle du sujet : c'est son double, some fantome, qui est toujours debout, à sa gauche, et parfois un peu en avant ...*

<sup>8</sup> Rochas, *Annales Psychiques*, 2 janvier 1894.

<sup>9</sup> Léon Lefranc, "Le Corps Astral du Vivant. Forme – Matière – Couleur", Deuxième Parti, Chapitre III, Essay du physiologie du corps Astral du vivant", *Le Monde Psychique*, 1911, pp. 70-81: *En marche il passe assez facilement à travers des obstacles matériels, tels que murs, portes, etc...*

<sup>10</sup> Investigated in the first decade of the twentieth century, N-rays were subsequently dismissed by the scientific community as arising from artefactual observations. Durville also used screens covered with sulphur, zinc and magnesium.

<sup>11</sup> "These experiments, repeated about ten times with seven or eight different subjects, always gave similar results, which were very intense when the screens had been well exposed to the sun, less so when the exposure had been insufficient." (Durville, H. Experimental researches concerning phantoms of the living. *Annals of Psychical Science*, 1908, 7, 335–343, p. 341.

<sup>12</sup> H. Durville, *Le Phantom des vivants*, 1909, pp. 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Lt.-Colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun, *Les Fluides des Magnétiseurs précis des expériences du Bon de Reichenbach sur ses propriétés physiques et physiologiques, classées et annotées par le lieutenant-colonel de Rochas d'Aiglun* (Paris: G. Carré, 1891).

<sup>14</sup> Fae Brauer, "Magnetic Modernism: František Kupka's Mesmeric Abstraction and Anarcho-Cosmic Utopia", *Utopia: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and (Im)possible Life*, eds. David Ayers, Benedikt Hjartarson, Tomi Huttunen, Harri Veivo (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) pp. 154-8.

<sup>15</sup> As Rochas surmised, two fluidic masses unify at the left of the subject: "an indecisive mass, a vaporous column, sensibly higher and larger than the subject. Following the action of magnetism directed at it and the subject, the mass diminishes in volume, condenses, becomes more luminous and little by little, takes a human form. As this form condenses further, it takes the exact form of the subject. This is their double, their phantom, which is always by their left side and sometimes in front of them. The contours are more or less clear and precise. With the continuance of the magnetism, the phantom becomes more condensed and more luminous particularly the head. Once it attains a certain point of condensation, it takes the attitude of the subject. If the subject is sitting comfortably in an armchair, so will the phantom. Like a shadow, he repeats all the movements and gestures of the subject. As it passes from one milieu to another, so clear is its image, that it can be photographed." Not only did it become clear to the magnetized subject but also to the magnetizer and others. Hence, as Durville concluded, they were able to "furnish proof of the dedoublement of the living subject through photographing le corps physique and the phantom" and, in so doing, prove that it was not the product of autosuggestion.

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<sup>16</sup> The tests reported by Durville represent a historically important attempt to empirically study the topic through the induction of experiences, and one deserving further investigation. The book was repeatedly cited by later writers on the topic. Some aspects of his work were replicated and extended, but the reports have fewer methodological details than Durville's (e.g., Lefranc, L. (1911). *Les états du sommeil magnétique du fantôme du vivant ou corps éthérique*. *Le Monde Psychique*, 1911, 1(2), 3–7).

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<sup>18</sup> However, Durville goes further. Through a series of well-planned experiments, he studied the phantom from all kinds of viewpoints. He found that its senses are identical to those of the corps physiques but infinitely more developed. After examining its vision, hearing, olfactory, taste and touch, he confirmed the acuity of its senses.